

Angry Little Asian Girl With Lela Lee Cartoonist and

Friday, Aug. 31, 2001; 2 p.m. EDT

http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/zforum/01/comic_le

"I created this comic strip, to address everything that I experienced through growing up. My parents couldn't coach me through the racism I got as a child . . . The reason I keep doing this comic strip is because not only do I really feel strongly about the subject, but with the positive feedback I have gotten, it has helped me to understand that I have hit on a nerve of some sort."

Submit your questions and comments to Lela Lee, creator of "Angry Little Asian Girl," before or during the discussion.

In 1994 Lela Lee first created "Angry Little Asian Girl" after viewing offensive and chauvinistic cartoons in the Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation. She sent a collection of short episodes to Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival and was asked for exhibition rights. The shorts were reviewed by the New York Times and the LA Weekly, both giving the video a spark. Inspired by the buzz, Lee decided to make a batch of "Angry Little Asian Girl" shirts and sold out. In 1998, Lee launched www.angrylittleasiangirl.com to meet request demand.

Currently, Lee is working on getting the strip syndicated and finishing her graphic novels with each of the characters having their own book. (6 total) Lee also acts and appeared in "Friends," "Felicity," "Scrubs," and "Rude Awakening."

Lee hopes her comic strip will help readers realize that racism situations can have a positive outcome.

Editor's Note: Washingtonpost.com moderators retain editorial control over Live Online discussions and choose the most relevant questions for guests and hosts; guests and hosts can decline to answer questions.

Lela Lee: Hello and good morning. I (Lela Lee) am going to be a few minutes early since I'm staring at my computer monitor and some interesting questions already queued up.

Arlington, Va.: Ms. Lee: I really admire the way you express yourself in such a constructive, thought-provoking way. I'm an artist, cartoonist and was hoping you might talk about how you draw and color your cartoons. Though your characters are hand-drawn, they are very expressive and unique, which took a lot of time cartooning.

Lela Lee: I only began seriously drawing because the "Angry Little Asian Girl 5 Angry Episodes" got such a great response. People referred to it as a comic strip, and at that point I didn't know how to draw really. I wasn't even really into comic books, I mean I read them, but not like I do now. When I started to teach myself about comic strips, I did have natural drawing ability. I was in grade school, my teachers always said I colored very well, but who knows what that indicated. I basically went to the library a lot and read all the books they had about cartoonists and cartoonists.

EraserheadGuy, D.C.: Hi, Lela. I adooooooooore Angry Little Asian Girl. Like my namesake film (hopefully an influence of your work) is a fine commentary on this great wrong world of ours. I missed it, but is there an archive of past comics on your website?

can only find the current one.

Lela Lee: I only archive 10 weeks worth of comics. May archive more, but right now, I only keep 10 at a

Arlington, Va.: Who did you play on "Friends

Lela Lee: I had a tiny tiny part. I was at Monica's cousin's wedding to which Monica was not invited. Monica asks me how I knew her and I reply "I used to work with her." And then she gets

Fairfax, Va.: You have a great site! You mentioned ALAC in response to some offensive comics you had seen. Has anyone commented that they found your comic's characters offensive? For example, I noticed that Deborah, the "disenchanted priestess" has a Jewish surname. Some might find this offensive.

Lela Lee: Thanks! I haven't had any remarks really about the comic. I did have one fellow who wrote in and wished that I might dispel the myth that everything is owned by Jewish people. But other than that, that's about it. I want the racial element to be something secondary to their emotions and personality. I think the emotions and moods that they have is what I relate best with, because I can only really speak honestly about what has occurred to me as an American, and even with that, I can't speak for all Americans. I can speak from my point of view and how I relate to the comic's emotion/personality.

Silver Spring, Md.: Your film is being shown at the Free Washington D.C. sometime in October. Will you be making an appearance and sign autographs by any chance?

washingtonpost.com: Information about Lela's film and the Pacific American Film Festival in October can be found on the Gallery Film Calendar website.

Lela Lee: No, unfortunately I will not be able to attend.

Mt. Rainier, Md.: I found it so sad that someone could be so young. I saw the panel where she yells 'Stupidhead' a fuzzyminded teacher who is assuming that she's a fool. I'm trying to see where the positive comes in here. Is this supposed to be our 'teachable moment' for the teacher who is probably between shocked and scared? So much anger, how does this end in?

Lela Lee: Good point. I did that video in 1994, when I was an angry college student. I was revisiting humiliating moments from my past and sort of reclaiming them thru the video-"if it were different, I wish I would have said this." Now as I've aged, I agree with what you are saying and firmly agree. Also because I have a responsibility (which I never thought about when I first created the video) I have to be careful of what I say. I've changed ALAG around a lot. I want it to be a positive read.

Anchorage, Alaska: I first started reading your strip

Magazine. love it!

Do you get more compliments from readers or complaints
folks?

Lela Lee: Thanks! I get both.

City of the Fallen Angels: Hi Lela,
I checked out ALAG a while ago and keep checking up
Is it just me, other chatters chime in here, but she does
particularity angry to me. She's not mad enough for the
funny enough. At times I feel like it's a multicultural
circus."

It's great that you are finding success doing this, great
an audience, but let's move out of this tired
colonialist/patriarchal critique.
I'm a Chinese American woman, for what it's worth.

Lela Lee: ALAG started off really angry. But I grew tired
it so angry in tone all the time. I felt it wasn't a true di
character if she was just one note all the time. So I me
and also let her be angry. I know sometimes my strip's
aren't the funniest, but I try.

Virginia: Actually, I was rather offended by the char
Deborah. Why is it bad for other people to make assum
Asians, but OK for you to make references to "Jewish P
am personally tired of this stereotype.

Lela Lee: I call her the "disenchanted princess." I want

"disenchanted" to be the emphasized word. She may s
princess, but she is actually quite unhappy with thir
opposition of those words can bring to light some ironie
tired of all those little girly things that say "I'm a prin
mean it's great to feel feminine and see yourself in a
but I'm trying to make fun of that.

Baltimore, Md.: Here is my angry Asian girl sentiment: As
born Asian, it is frustrating when white Americans ques
to my culture, or act surprised that I can speak a lang
than English. If they've never experienced growing
traditional Asian household, how can they make such
judgments? What is the best way to communicate this
manner that educates them without offending th

Lela Lee: I think the best way to communicate is just t
when it occurs. Or even after the fact. Just make sure
a way that they can hear it. I think culturally as Asia
taught to not say what we feel and to brush things und
you say your frustration in a non-confrontational way to
who you want to speak it to, I think that might be the
simplest way to deal with that. People are surprisingly
least try to understand.

Philadelphia, Penn.: What future plans do you have for AL
pointed me towards your website but I haven't seen in it
Do you hope for this strip to be as wide read as Pear
acting your main career?

Lela Lee: I dream of "Peanuts!"

Wouldn't that be great!
I have been working on getting syndicated in papers. But it's
really tough. Tougher than acting. Syndicates get about
10,000 submissions a year and can only launch about 1-2
there's the task of getting space in the comics page. Or
in papers and has a following, it hardly ever leaves. So
I definitely want to be syndicated. I just have to be

Berkeley, Calif.: Hi.

What year did you graduate from Berkeley. And did you work
the Daily Cal?

Lela Lee: 1996.
No I never worked at the Daily Cal. Though I did read

Arlington, Va.: Hey Lela,
Speaking about "Friends", my APA friends and I think there's
a similar show called "Rice" with the cast being from
ethnic groups. You know, rice is a staple in the globe.
Eleanor

Lela Lee: Good idea!

Virginia: Hi,
I was just reading some of the comics on your Web page

the things that confused me was your discussion of the word "oriental." You said that "oriental" is offensive because it means "from far away," while "occidental" means central. But these words (both Latin derived) mean "eastern" (oriental) and "western" (occidental). This is, in fact, still the meaning of the two words in both Spanish and Portuguese. So I don't really think describing someone as "eastern" or "western" is offensive, but that it is sort of unspecific.

Lela Lee: I realize I was touching on sensitive ground. But I think that history and history is always based on a perspective. I read a book called "Orientalism" by Said in college which was discussed by my professor at length. It's just a theory I learned which I think is interesting and valid in my eyes. I made it into a comic strip to provoke thought. But it is a theory. I think I'm going to stick to theories since it lit off a huge discussion which I don't think I am not a historian nor am I a professor.

Washington, D.C.: Hello Lela!

Could you talk about how anger can be a positive thing? Is it prejudice, in real life and not just in comic strips? What do you say to critics who claim that anger should be suppressed because it worsens race relations?

Lela Lee: I think when one gets angry, one can be motivated a lot. That is if they don't resort to violent things. Hopefully when one is angered, they can think logically and work out a plan of action. If one is happy or just content, nothing ever gets done. Anger is not a bad thing. It can make one get so fed up that they will act against the thing that angers them.

Somewhere, USA: In response to the Asian-American from
tend to think that most people who are rude do not m
Frequently someone may not know that a particular subj
spot with you. When someone says something to me th
culturally insensitive, I usually just try to correct them
move on. Or if they are just asking rude questions, I j
non-answer and change the subject. It usually works

Lela Lee: Yes, I do think people are mostly kind hearted
mean to offend others. Your response to just correct them
is a great and simple solution to unintentional rude

Arlington, Va.: Some comments and question
First, I really dig what you're doing. I think there is m
depicting the anger because that's real. I can think of
times I wish I had gone off on someone for making a "S
worthy comment but didn't say anything. Second, even th
on feelings and situations, people are going to be hyp
about anything you do even hinting at race, and will mis
when their hackles raise. How much do your detractors
take issue with you as opposed to just having a misguid
reaction to your work just because there's racial (no
aspects?

Lela Lee: Thank you.
I wish too that I was able to respond in those situat
I think both happens, I think some have a knee-jerk react
the strip has a colorful cast. But I do think everyone
legitimate issue if they have an issue. I was never an a
I did have experiences that were less than savory. I s
strip to go back and reclaim those things, and when I
people took notice because they probably had similar ex
think most of the people who have issues are sensitive
But I do thank you for seeing that the strip has racial el
is not racist.

Arlington, Va.: Unfortunately, it's not just Asia and Africa. Americans are uniformed and misinformed about. I'm from Ireland, and you should hear the questions I get, from Ireland and England all one big island?" to "Are you in Ireland?" "My great-great-great aunt Ann O'Neill came from County Kerry, do you know her?" to "Are you an alcoholic?" These are actual questions actual Americans have asked me. I'm not making that up.

But at least no one forms an opinion about me just based on my physical appearance.

Lela Lee: That's funny! you should do stand-up with that.

Philadelphia, Penn.: How much of your everyday life goes into your characters scenarios?

Lela Lee: Sometimes I'll remember an incident and put it into a comic strip. It has to fit the story line for the comic strip. Or if I hear something someone and they say something funny, I will write it into a comic strip. usually I don't tell them until afterwards. That way they can't say they are doing a stand-up routine and on the spot. I like to let things just come out naturally.

Maryland: When I was growing up we used to tease a Chinese girl who lived in our neighborhood. We liked her but we

fun of her name because it was different and we didn't
better. None of the adults ever corrected us either.

After living and traveling in Asia, now I know better but
didn't give her too much baggage! So I am glad that you
people to look beyond stereotypes.

Lela Lee: I think that girl wrote into the angry board la

Alexandria, Va.: I don't really have a question I just lea
your site mere days ago but I LOVE IT! I can't wait for t
show, and anything else you can think of. I think this
comic strip that is so important to girls and women! I ju
thank you for letting girls where black when they are g
saying "f*** you" when they want to! Keep up the good w
merchandise!

Lela Lee: Thank you!

Bethesda, Md.: Lela Lee,

Do you feel that it's more acceptable to make r
comments/assumptions about Asians than most other eth
country?

As an Asian-American, I continually find myself anger
comments made throughout the media. I am doubly ange
of outrage. I am relieved when people speak out about
American and anti-Hispanic-American remarkrs, but outrag
consider anti-Asian remarks no big deal.

As 4% of the population are we too small to care about the old stereotype of Asians as the "model minority" that makes acceptable targets?

Thanks,
Disenchanted woman

Lela Lee: I think the lack of outrage is a cultural thing for Asians. It's really up to Asians to be vocal.

Rockville, Md.: How did you like working with the cast of Friends? I would assume they would be a great group of people to work with but what did you think?

Lela Lee: The cast of "Friends" was very nice. I only met David Schwimmer, Cox and David Scwhimmer-both were really nice. Especially David Schwimmer!

Washington D.C.: I love the comic and the characters. I hope that the development of the characters will create a large audience and if so what is your target audience?

Lela Lee: I created the other characters because I was given feedback "sorry, there's just no market for Asians." I also saw people selling shirts out on the streets, that a lot of non-Asians got the sentiment, but felt unable to partake because they were "angry little asian girl." So I expanded it for that reason so anyone will read my strip!

Everything isn't visual: I'm Jewish, but don't 'look' it--
I've gotten surprised looks when I observe or mention Jewish
and traditions.

I try to be kind, and usually succeed, but many times I've
reply, 'Looks can be deceiving--you don't look like a

Lela Lee: That's a great comeback!

I.T.B.: A recent "Angry Little Asian Girl" strip contains
inaccurate information about the meanings of "oriental" and
"occidental." The strip said they mean "far away" and "west",
respectively. Actually they just mean "eastern" and "western"
derive from ancient words referring to rising and setting (of the
sun). I like your strip a lot but it did grieve me to see the
legend make it in like that.

Lela Lee: Yes I know. I got a lot of emails regarding the
strip. It was inspired by a book I read in college and the author
talked at length about the theory posed by the author of the
realize now it is a theory and that definitions, history and
can be very debatable. But there IS a difference between
someone Asian and Oriental. The latter can be taken

Arlington, Va.: Not a question, but just an annoying occurrence
the elevator this morning that your strips sum up perfectly

A guy gets on the elevator and starts speaking Japanese, thinking he's just such a clever guy. Wish I spoke some Japanese language so I could show him how stupid his assumption is.

But we all look alike, don't we? Like blacks all speak the same language or jive talk.

Grrrr. Sometimes other minorities don't think about their own experiences.

Lela Lee: Very true!

Alexandria, Va.: I just wanna say YOU ROCK. Keep the good music and keep me smiling! Hi-Fiver's!

Lela Lee: Hi five!

Springfield, Va.: Don't you think that due to P.C. hyperbole, comedy has become more based on bodily fluids rather than wit, that it only adds to the polarization of the country?

Lela Lee: Political correctness has made some forms of humor a little bland. And it has made people feel like they are walking on eggshells. But I think it has been good for educating people on what is acceptable nowadays. Who knows what PC does to the future?

Rockville, Md: Hi,
I just found out about your comic strip a couple of hours ago. I haven't read it yet. But does the theme only deal with Asian stereotypes/prejudices in general or does/will it deal with female inferiority in old asian cultures? Just curious.

Lela Lee: Hopefully both. I'm going to introduce her parents to what will tie in traditional Asian beliefs.

El Cerrito, Calif.: Thank you for providing an outlet for Americans to release their pent up frustrations at the stereotypes that abound. Do you draw mostly upon your own personal experiences or do you research others' experiences? Please keep it up! An invaluable contribution to our free speech in America and I hope it will make this more enlightened for my sons (2 yrs old).

Lela Lee: I intend to keep it up!

Takoma Park, Md.: You Go Girl! There's a lot of Angry Girls out here! Love the strip, am sending away for a copy.

Lela Lee: Great! Thank you!

Here's the last para that got truncated:

Lela Lee: Thank you for your questions! I am grateful to have an outlet so my intentions could be better understood. I realize my strip has touched many nerves in irritating ways and in general, what I aim for is a dialogue and for these situations to be brushed under the rug. Mostly, the strip has racial elements and a cast of colorful characters, and for that reason, a dialogue.

begun. I grew up with no reflections/images of myself and from my parents with regard to misunderstandings and college I made a short video to revisit those events. That set off a buzz. People called it a comic strip which at the time I hadn't done. So I made it into a comic strip because I realized many people wanted to hear more. Hopefully, with time it will be syndicated in newspapers and the fact that they are covering such an issue. The comic strip can be about girls who have colorful and the lives they lead. Thank you very much!

lunch now. (It's 12:40 pm here in CA)